

WOMEN IN INDUSTRY

A STUDY IN AMERICAN ECONOMIC HISTORY

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WITH AN INTRODUCTORY NOTE

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

THE work of women for wages under a competitive organization of industry presents a problem of compelling interest. Women have, of course, always worked. The invention of the processes essential to orderly and secure group life was the contribution of primitive women.¹ Under the organization of labor developed by the Greeks and Romans;² in the workshops of the monasteries and convents of the Middle Ages;³ as members of the crafts in which they took an honorable position,⁴ governed by the regulations

¹ Bucher, "Industrial Evolution," Chaps. I, II; Thomas, "Sex and Society," p. 126; Pearson, "Chances of Death," ii, 49. "The civilization of woman handed down a mass of useful custom and knowledge; it was for after generations to accept that and eradicate the rest. When I watch to-day the peasant women of Southern Germany and of Norway toiling in the house and field, while the male looks on, I do not think the one a downtrodden slave of the other. She appears to me the bearer of a civilization to which he has not yet attained. She may be the fossil of the mother age, but he is a fossil of a still lower stratum—barbarism pure and simple."

² Leroy-Beaulieu, "Le travail des femmes au dix-neuvième siècle," p. 5.

³ Eckenstein, "Woman Under Monasticism," Chap. VII.

⁴ For example, in Paris, see Dixon, "Craftswomen in the Livre des Métiers," *Economic Journal*, v, 209.

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as to hours, wages, fines, apprentices, and promotion, identical with those under which men worked; in the English "factories" of the fourteenth century;¹ in the domestic or cottage system of industry which prevailed largely in England prior to the industrial revolution;² in the work of household production in America during the colonial and early republican period; under every industrial system, women have had a recognized position.

The dignity and honor of their relation to their work have varied with the dignity and honor with which they have been generally regarded. When they were slaves their occupation assumed a servile character; and it may be that the dishonor often apparently attaching to labor grows out of the fact that production was first exclusively in the hands of women.³ On the other hand, under some systems the position of women in relation to their work has been one of real power. In such a system as characterized American life during the earliest period described in the following study, when goods were made in and for the household from raw materials furnished by the household, the woman determined what should be made and how the product should be distributed. In fact the extent to which the spending function is conceded her by the family group to-day when the family has

¹ Taylor, "The Modern Factory System," p. 53.

² Taylor, pp. 57, 58; Toynbee, "Industrial Revolution," p. 53.

³ Veblen, "Barbarian Status of Women," *American Journal of Sociology*, iv, 501.

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become simply a center of consumption, is a survival of the control which was hers when the family was still a producing unit.

Women have not, however, always worked for wages. Without dwelling upon the fact that, under simple forms of organization, the return for labor is often combined with payment for the use of tools and for materials, it might be noted that in the period just preceding the introduction of the factory system both in England and America, production was often so carried on as to allow the return for the labor of the entire family to be collected by the head of the family who had the legal right to the time and earnings both of his wife and of his minor children.¹

The family wage was common then, and it was determined in part by the standard of the group, and in part by the bargaining power of the man who collected it. To-day there is a group wage in so far as various classes are paid "supplementary wages," but these are determined not by the bargaining power of the man, but often by the helplessness of the woman and of the minor children who have become the apparent collectors of their own wages.

Objections are, therefore, raised and difficulties encountered, due not to any novel industrial activity on the part of women, but to the disturbance created by

¹ See in a later discussion, for illustrations of the way in which the man collected the wage for the group well into the nineteenth century and even after the members of the group had followed their work to the factory.

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for all members of the community. The following study is, therefore, offered in the belief that it has real significance for those concerned with the problem of wage-earning women.

It has, however, a wider interest than this. A field in American economic history hitherto substantially untouched is here disclosed. Moreover, with the history of the growth of our great manufacturing industries for the most part still unwritten, the difficulties in the way of such an inquiry as the present are very great. But there is for the same reason greater value in the contribution which is made by this study to our knowledge of early economic conditions and relationships, of the technical development of the industries discussed, of early governmental policy relating to industry, as well as to our correct understanding of the industrial opportunity of the working woman of an earlier time and the progress which she has made up to the present day.

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PREFACE

THE following investigation was begun in 1905 when I published jointly with Dr. S. P. Breckinridge, of the University of Chicago, with whom I was then studying, an analysis of recent census statistics dealing with the employment of women. The result of our statistical inquiry was to show that, while the present tendency was toward an increase in gainful employment among women, that increase had been only normal, considering the rate of increase in the population, in the group of industrial occupations designated in the census as "manufacturing and mechanical pursuits" while there had been a disproportionately large increase only in the occupational group "trade and transportation." With nearly a million and a half women in our manufacturing industries and no recent influx into the occupations in this group, it was evident that the presence of women in our mills and factories was not a new phenomenon; and it became a matter of interest to discover just how long and how far women had been an industrial factor of importance.

The employment of women, therefore, became a

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problem in economic history, and although we realized that, at a time when so many questions concerning the working woman were pressing for immediate solution, it might well seem academic and impractical to deal only with her past, we believed that a truthful account of that past might throw some light on present-day problems.

This volume is, therefore, an attempt to carry on the investigation from the point at which it was left four years ago. The continuation of the study was made possible in the first instance through the assistance of the Carnegie Institution of Washington, and to the late Carroll D. Wright, then at the head of the Department of Economics and Sociology, grateful acknowledgment must be made.

I have already said that Dr. Breckinridge and I began this study as a joint investigation, and although my absence from Chicago for three years made it impossible for us to continue the work together, I have throughout that time worked under her general direction and I have had always the benefit of her generous and sympathetic counsel. It has been my privilege during the past year to be again closely associated with her, so that in the work of revision and in preparation for the press, these chapters have been constantly submitted to her for criticism. It is not possible for me to say just what or how much the book owes to her, but without her assistance it would never have been written.

It is a pleasure also to acknowledge the debt which

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I owe to two other friends, to Miss Clara E. Collet, M.A., Honorary Fellow of University College, London, and senior investigator of women's industries in the Board of Trade (Labour Department), and to Dr. Frances Gardiner Davenport of the Department of Historical Research in the Carnegie Institution of Washington.

To Miss Collet I am indebted, not for direct help in connection with the preparation of these chapters, but, in common with all students of the history and statistics of women's employment, for the invaluable work which she has done in this field. Four years ago, in our first published study, Dr. Breckinridge and I made public acknowledgment of the stimulus and help we had received from a study of Miss Collet's reports to the Board of Trade on the "Employment of Women and Girls." Not only for these but for her reports on the same subject prepared for the Royal Commission on Labour as well as for her earlier investigations in connection with the preparation of Booth's "Life and Labour of the People," and for her other brilliant and suggestive studies of women's work, all later students of the subject are under obligation to her.

The debt to Miss Davenport is of quite another sort, for her own studies have been in a more remote field of history. But it has been my privilege, at different times, to submit several of these chapters to her for criticism, and the book does, therefore, embody some of her suggestions. It has, moreover, been a

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constant source of reassurance, during the four years in which this volume has been in preparation to know that she believed the subject worthy of investigation as a neglected chapter in our economic history.

A large part of the material presented in this book has appeared from time to time since 1906 in the form of a series of articles in the *Journal of Political Economy*, and acknowledgment should be made to the editors for their courtesy in placing this material again at my disposal. While it has been in large part revised and rewritten, chapters VII and VIII are reprinted substantially as they appeared. I have also to thank the editors of the *American Journal of Sociology* and of the *Publications of the Association of Collegiate Alumnae* for kindly allowing me to use again some of the material published in their magazines.

E. A.

HULL HOUSE, CHICAGO,
October 1, 1909.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

PUBLIC opinion in this country has been recently concerned with the increase in gainful employment among women, and misapprehension has arisen from a failure to understand the complexity of the problem; for the employment of women presents not one question but many questions. There is, for example, the familiar problem of domestic service which is, numerically, the most important women's occupation. Quite different problems appear in connection with agriculture and the other extractive occupations such as mining and smelting. In the professions there are still to face the old questions of restriction of opportunity, of equal work for unequal pay, as well as the new and larger question of the way in which new power acquired by women through the removal of educational and social barriers may be most easily turned to social ends.

In the group of occupations, including stenography, typewriting, bookkeeping, and salesmanship, which are connected not with the industrial but with the business organization of the day, there is a long series

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of problems of which perhaps the most pressing is the effect of the pin-money worker who makes of her occupation a "parasitic trade." And finally, there is the question of the employment of women in industrial occupations, about which there is some prejudice and a good deal of misunderstanding.

An increase, therefore, in gainful employment among women becomes a distinct question for each of these several groups. While it is true that the public mind does, unconsciously perhaps, differentiate them, this is done for the most part illogically and unscientifically. With regard to the number of women entering two of the five occupational groups, agriculture, in which the women employed are chiefly the negro women of the South, and domestic service, public opinion has little concern. There is no fear of a disproportionate increase in either of them. But it is, on the other hand, generally assumed that the number of gainfully employed women has increased alike in the professions, in "trade and transportation," and in manufacturing industries. The professional woman and the woman commercially employed are, however, almost exclusively characteristic of the present day, while the woman in industry is older than the factory system itself. In the first half of the nineteenth century, at a time when educated and uneducated women alike worked in mills and factories, the employment of women in the professions or in clerical positions was comparatively rare. As late as 1855, for example, the employment of women

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as clerks was unusual. An article in Hunt's *Merchant's Magazine* for that year called attention to the "employment of ladies as clerks in stores" as an item of special interest, and a contemporary newspaper commented as follows: "The *New York Times* is earnestly advocating the employment of females as clerks in stores—particularly all retail dry goods stores. It is an employment for which they are well fitted, and would properly enlarge their sphere of action and occupation and it is a business that they can do better than men. . . . It would give employment to a great many young ladies, and would be degrading no one willing to earn a living."

Between the year 1870, when the census first presented statistical data on the subject, and the year 1900, the percentage which women formed of the total number of persons employed in "professional service" had increased from 1.6 per cent to 10.5 per cent, in "trade and transportation" from 24.8 per cent to 43.2 per cent, in the manufactures group from 13 per cent to 19 per cent.¹ Census statistics for the last decade of the nineteenth century make more clear, perhaps, the fact that in recent years the increase in gainful employment among women has not

¹ This is the increase according to the Census of Occupations. According to the Census of Manufactures it would be from 16 per cent to 19 per cent. The former percentages are used here for the sake of uniformity since those for the other occupational groups can be obtained only from Census of Occupations. But those from the Census of Manufactures are believed to be more reliable. On this point, however, see Appendix B.

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been in the industrial group. A study of the table given below will make this point more clear. This table shows the number of women and the number of men employed in the five large occupational groups of the census classification in 1890 and in 1900. The table also makes possible a comparison not of absolute numbers and percentages alone, but of the number of persons in each ten thousand of the total number of persons over ten years of age who were employed in these different groups of occupations in 1900 and 1890, and the resulting increases or decreases.

From this table it appears,¹ (1) that the most striking increases both for men and women are in the group "trade and transportation," (2) that for women three of the other groups—"professional service," "manufacturing and mechanical pursuits," "domestic and personal service"—show fairly equal gains and the group "agriculture" is not far behind; (3) that the increase in the number of men who are going into "manufacturing and mechanical pursuits" is greater than the increase in the number of women entering the same group; that is, 19 more women and 34 more men out of every ten thousand of each sex in the population went into the manufacturing group in 1900 than had entered in 1890. It should be pointed out that the percentage increase would be

¹ For a more elaborate discussion of this table, see an article on the "Employment of Women," Twelfth Census Statistics, by Sophonisba P. Breckinridge and Edith Abbott in the *Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. xiv, pp. 14-41.

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slightly larger for women than men, 27.7 against 24.1, but such percentages cannot, of course, be properly compared, for a comparatively small increase in a

CLASSES OF OCCUPATIONS.	WOMEN.		MEN.	
	1900.	1890.	1900.	1890.
Agriculture.....	977,336	769,845	9,404,429	8,378,603
Professional service.....	430,597	311,687	827,941	632,646
Domestic and personal service.....	2,095,449	1,667,651	3,485,298	2,553,161
Trade and transportation.....	503,347	228,421	4,263,617	3,097,701
Manufacturing and mechanical pursuits.....	1,312,668	1,027,928	5,772,641	4,650,540
All occupations.....	5,319,397	4,005,532	23,753,836	19,312,651
Population over ten years.....	28,246,384	23,060,900	29,703,440	24,352,659

CLASSES OF OCCUPATIONS.	NUMBER OF WOMEN EMPLOYED PER 10,000 WOMEN OF AND ABOVE 10 YEARS OF AGE.			NUMBER OF MEN EMPLOYED PER 10,000 MEN OF AND ABOVE 10 YEARS OF AGE.			
	1900.	1890.	Increase.	1900.	1890.	Increase.	Decrease.
Agriculture.....	346.0	333.8	12.2	3166.1	3440.5	.....	274.4
Professional service.....	152.4	135.1	17.3	278.7	259.7	.....	19.0
Domestic and personal service.....	741.8	723.1	18.7	1173.3	1048.4	.....	124.9
Trade and transportation.....	178.1	99.0	79.1	1435.3	1272.0	.....	163.3
Manufacturing and mechanical pursuits.....	464.7	445.7	19.0	1943.4	1909.6	.....	33.8
All occupations.....	1883.2	1736.9	146.3	7997.0	7930.3	.....	66.7

small number will show a larger percentage of increase than a much larger increase in a large number.

For women, then, trade and transportation alone shows a disproportionate increase; it is into this group

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of occupations that the new recruits to the ranks of gainfully employed women have largely gone; and whatever the problem of women in industry may be, it is clearly not a new one within the last ten, or even the last thirty, years.

The point of departure to-day in most discussions regarding women in industry is the home. It is assumed that the presence of women in industrial life is a new phenomenon and one to be viewed with alarm. The employment of women, it is feared, will mean greater competition and ultimately the displacement of men. Because the labor of women is cheaper, the woman, it is said, will usurp the place of the breadwinner; and the home will be ruined. Much attention has been given in late years to the employment of women in our manufacturing establishments of the present day, to questions concerning the physical and moral surroundings under which they work, their wages, the length of the working day. But no attempt has as yet been made to deal with the historic background out of which these questions emerge; and upon the student of economic history, therefore, devolves the task of tracing out from the records of our industrial development, such an account of the working woman's past as may throw light on the problems of to-day.

The present study is, therefore, not an investigation into present conditions of women's work and wages, but an inquiry into the history and statistics of the employment of women in America. Without

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such a study it is impossible to examine properly certain fundamental questions relating to women's work. How far is the gainful employment of women, either in the home or away from it, peculiarly characteristic of the nineteenth century? Has the growth of our manufacturing industries provided a new field for the employment of women? Or has there only been an increase in the opportunity for work in those employments which have long existed? And has the result of it all been that what was formerly "men's work" has passed into the hands of women?

It is believed that an inquiry into the history of women's work and a consideration of the early attitude toward such work, together with a study of the statistics of their employment during the last century, may be worth while, not only as a contribution toward the history of an important subject, but because of the practical bearing it may have upon the problems connected with the employment of women to-day. Women's work is often considered too exclusively in its theoretical aspects. Statistics for the first half of the century are not brought into their proper relation with those of the latter half. The early attitude toward the employment of women is not only outgrown but forgotten. Moreover, attempts to discover how far women have taken the places of men as factory employees by a study of census statistics for the last few decades have been, and must necessarily be, futile; for that is merely touching in a

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superficial way a problem that is as old as the factory system itself.

It will appear that it is essential to any profitable discussion of women's work that a line of delimitation be drawn between questions concerning the employment of professional women and those relating to the employment of women in industry. While the problems of all gainfully employed women, whether professionally trained and educated or untrained and unskilled, are fundamentally interdependent, yet for many purposes they must be considered separate questions; and the working woman has undoubtedly been wronged in the past because of the pseudo-democratic refusal to recognize class distinctions in discussions of the woman question. Moreover, a failure to see important points of unlikeness has led, at times, to confusion in theory and to unfortunate practical results. It is, for example, a part of the history of the struggle for factory legislation in England that an unwillingness to grant that the working woman had peculiar grievances delayed the progress of very necessary reforms.¹

It has, finally, been too often assumed that the conspicuous broadening of the field of opportunities and activities for educated women during the latter half of the nineteenth century has been a progress without class distinctions in which all women have shared

¹See the chapter on "The Women's Rights Opposition," Hutchins and Harrison, "History of Factory Legislation," pp. 183, 184.

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alike. But the history of the employment of women in professional and industrial life has been radically different, and the fruits of that long struggle of the last century for what is perhaps nebulously described as "women's rights," have gone, almost exclusively, to the women of the professional group.

CHAPTER II

THE COLONIAL PERIOD

A STUDY of the relation of the woman wage earner to the factory system in this country involves some preliminary inquiry regarding her share in the work done under more primitive methods of production. Industrially we were a backward nation and, for a considerable time after our political independence had been secured, we remained economically dependent upon England. At the close of the first decade of the nineteenth century development of our manufacturing industries had scarcely begun.

A detailed survey of the field of employment for women during this earlier period is impossible because of the scarcity of records. Moreover, such a study would be on the whole unprofitable. It has, however, seemed justifiable to present the following body of material dealing with the employment of women during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, because though somewhat fragmentary, covering a considerable period of time dealing with a large and miscellaneous group of occupations, and confined chiefly to a single section of the country, it

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is believed to contribute to an understanding of the relation of women to the later industrial system.

Our primary interests during this early period were agriculture and commerce, and there was very little field for the industrial employment either of men or women. Such manufactures as were carried on in these early centuries were chiefly household industries and the work was necessarily done in the main by women. Indeed, it would not be far wrong to say that, during the colonial period, agriculture was in the hands of men, and manufacturing, for the most part, in the hands of women. Men were, to be sure, sometimes weavers, shoemakers, or tailors; and here and there women of notable executive ability, such as the famous Eliza Lucas of South Carolina,¹ managed farms and plantations.

It is of interest to note, too, in this connection that in the case of land allotments in early New England, women who were heads of families received their proportion of planting land; and in Salem, Plymouth, and the Cape Cod towns women could not get enough land. Although spinsters did not fare so well, it is a matter of record that in Salem even unmarried women were at first given a small allotment. The custom of granting "maid's lotts," however, was soon discontinued in order to avoid "all presedents and evil events of graunting lotts unto single maidens not dis-

¹ See Harriott Ravenel, "Life of Eliza Pinckney."

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posed of.”¹ In accordance with this ungallant decision, the “Salem Town Records” show one “Deborah Holmes refused Land being a maid but hath four bushels of corn granted her . . . and would be a bad presedent to keep house alone.” In 1665, in Pennsylvania, 75 acres of land were promised to every female over fourteen years of age, and while this does not mean that the management of the lands was necessarily in their hands, in many cases this must have happened.

But although daughters and wives often helped at home with what was rather rough work, cutting wood, milking, and the like, and the girl in service did similar “chores,” it was not customary to employ women to any large extent for regular farm work. This was, of course, in contrast to the practice in England and on the Continent, where women, at this time, were regularly hired as reapers, mowers, and haymakers. An early account of Virginia says with regard to this point that “the women are not, as is reported, put into the ground to worke but occupie such domestique employments as in England. . . . Yet some wenches that are not fit to be so employed are put into the ground.”² It seems, there-

¹ These details are found in Professor Herbert B. Adam's interesting study in the “Johns Hopkins University Studies,” First Series, vols. ix-x, “Allotments of Land in Salem to Men, Women and Maids,” pp. 34, 35.

² Hammond, “Leah and Rachel” (London, 1656). Reprinted in Force, *Tracts*, iii.

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fore, clear that, with the exception of such cases as have been reported, the work on the farms was done by men.

Women on the other hand, were, for the most part engaged in the domestic cares of the household, which included at that time the manufacture within the home of a large proportion of the articles needed for household use. And besides the occupations of a domestic kind, there were, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, various other employments open to them which it may be worth while to notice without attempting to apply the classification growing out of the more complex organization of the present day. An attempt will be made, therefore, to give a brief account of all gainful occupations in which women were engaged without attempting to classify them.

One of the oldest of these was the keeping of taverns and “ordinaries.” In 1643, the General Court of Massachusetts granted Goody Armitage permission to “keepe the ordinary, but not to drawe wine,”¹ and throughout this century and the next the Boston town records show repeated instances of the granting of such licenses to women. In 1669, for example, “Widdow Snow and Widdow Upshall were ‘approved of to sell beere and wine for the yeare ensuinge and keep houses of publique entertainment’;” and there are records of the granting of similar permissions to other women on condition that

¹ “Massachusetts Colonial Records,” ii, 46.

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they "have a careful and sufficient man to manage the house." Such licenses were granted most frequently to widows, but occasionally to wives. Thus the wife of Thomas Hawkins was given permission to sell liquors "by retayle" only because of "the selectmen consideringe the necessitie and weake condition of her Husband."

Shopkeeping was another of the early gainful employments for women in this country. The "New Haven Colonial Records" contain a most interesting account of a woman shopkeeper who flourished for a time during the first half of the seventeenth century, and then became involved in serious difficulties because of her method of systematic overcharging. In 1643 an indignant customer appealed to the court, charging that he had "heard of the dearnes of her commodities, the excessive gaynes she tooke, was discouradged from proceedinge and accordingly bid his man tel her he would have none of her cloth." He asked the court to deal with her "as an oppressor of the commonweale" and offered ten specific charges; among them, "that she sold primmers at 9 pence a piece which cost but 4 pence here in New England" and that "she sold a peece of cloth to the two Mecars at 23s. 4d. per yard in wompom, the cloth cost her about 12s. per yard and sold when wompom was in great request."¹ It is of interest that Higginson refers to this employment for women in asking pat-

¹ "New Haven Colonial Records," i, 174-176, 147.

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ronage for "sister Wharton's two daughters to help forward their shop-keeping"; and, he adds significantly that they "are like to continue as ancient maids I know not how long, Sarah being 25 or 26 years old!"

Other kinds of business attracted women in this same period. The raising of garden seeds and similar products seems to have been a common occupation.¹ Women were sometimes shrewd traders and, often, particularly in the seaboard towns, venturesome enough to be speculators. An interesting example of the way in which women along the coast sometimes risked their savings is to be found in an old memorandum of one Margaret Barton which belongs to the year 1705 and is preserved in the Boston Public Library's collection of manuscripts. This woman, who claimed to have served a full apprenticeship in the trade of "chair frame making" and to have worked at it for a time, seems to have made quite a fortune for those days in "ventures at sea." She was, however, a rather disreputable person, for the "Boston Selectmen's Records" show that she was "warned out of town," and her testimony may not be altogether reliable.

Among the other gainful employments for women in this period which were not industrial might be mentioned keeping a "dame's school" which, though

¹ See, for example, advertisements in the *Boston Evening Post*, January 25, 1745; *Boston Gazette*, April 19, 1748; *New England Weekly Journal*, March 10, 1741.

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a very unremunerative occupation, was often resorted to.¹ There were, too, many notable nurses and midwives; in Bristol a woman was ringer of the bell and kept a meeting-house, and in New Haven a woman was appointed to "sweepe and dresse the meeting house every weeke and have 1s. a weeke for her pains." The common way, however, for a woman to earn her board and a few pounds a year was by going out to service. But it should be noted that the domestic servant in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was employed for a considerable part of her time in processes of manufacture and that, without going far wrong, one might classify this as an industrial occupation. A servant, for example, who was a good spinner or a good tailoress, was valued accordingly, and advertisements in eighteenth-century newspapers frequently mention this as a qualification.

There remain, however, a number of instances, in which women were employed in and were even at the head of what might, strictly speaking, be called industrial establishments. A woman, for example, occasionally ran a mill, carried on a distillery, or even worked in a sawmill. The "Plymouth Colony Records" note in 1644 that "Mistress Jenny, upon the presentment against her, promiseth to amend the

¹ There is a record of a woman keeping such a school in New Haven before 1656. See Blake, "Chronicles of New Haven Green," p. 184; and see also Sewall, "History of Woburn," p. 52, for a further note on such work.

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grinding at the mill, and to keep morters cleane, and baggs of corne from spoyleing and looseing." At Mason's settlement at Piscataqua, "eight Danes and twenty two women" were employed in sawing lumber and making potash.¹ In 1693 a woman appears with two men on the pages of the "Boston Town Records" "desiring leave to build a slaughter house." But all of these seem to have been unusual employments.

There were, however, a great many women printers in the eighteenth century, and these women were both compositors and worked at the press. Several colonial newspapers were published by women and they printed books and pamphlets as well. Women were also employed in the early paper mills, where they were paid something like the equivalent of seventy-five cents a week and board.

Although there is no doubt of the fact that women were gainfully employed away from home at this time, such employment was quite unimportant compared with work which they did in their own homes.

In considering minor industrial occupations within the home we find that a few women were bakers² and some were engaged in similar work, such as mak-

¹ Weeden, "Social and Economic History of New England," i, 168; and see p. 310 for note of a woman who bolted flour for her neighbors.

² See, for example, Felt, "Annals of Salem," ii, 152; and see also the mention of Widow Gray in *Boston News Letter*, January 21, 1711.

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ing and selling of preserves or wine.¹ But the great majority of women in this group were employed in the manufacture of textiles, which in its broadest sense includes knitting, lacemaking, the making of cards for combing cotton and wool, as well as sewing, spinning and weaving.

Some women must have found knitting a profitable by-employment. Knit stockings sold for two shillings a pair, and occasionally for much more. One old account book records that "Ann" sold a "pare of stockens for 16s." Sewing and tailoring were standard occupations and were variously remunerated,—one woman made "shirts for the Indians" at eightpence each, and "men's breeches" for a shilling and sixpence a pair, and in addition to this work of tailoring she taught school, did spinning and weaving for good pay, managed her house, was twice married and had fourteen children.²

Spinning and weaving, the processes upon which the making of cloth depended, absorbed a great deal of the time of the women and girls of the period. This work was not uniformly organized according to any one industrial system. In the seventeenth century, the work was household industry; the raw materials were furnished by the household and the finished product was for household use; but so far as

¹ The *New England Weekly Journal*, July 5, 1731, advertises a shop kept by a woman for the exclusive sale of preserves and similar products.

² See Temple and Sheldon, "History of Northfield," p. 163.

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any part of it was marketed or exchanged at the village store, the system became closely akin to handicraft. The commodity that was exchanged or sold belonged to the woman as a true craftswoman, the material had been hers and the product, until she disposed of it, was her own capital. When the article was sold directly to the consumer, as frequently happened, even the final characteristic of handicraft, the fact of its being "custom work," was present.¹

With the expansion of the industry, especially in the latter half of the eighteenth century, a considerable part of the work was done more in the manner of what is known as the commission system. As yarn came to be in great demand, many women were regularly employed spinning at home for purchasers who were really commission merchants. These men sometimes sold the yarn but often they put it out again to be woven and then sold the cloth.

The most important occupations for women, therefore, before the establishment of the factory system, were spinning and weaving. It is impossible to make any estimate of the number of women who did such work, or of their earnings, of the proportion of home-

¹ This discussion of industrial systems follows in the main Bucher's analysis in his "Industrial Evolution" (Wickett's translation), Chap. IV, and the introductory chapter in Unwin, "Industrial Organization in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," in which Bucher's interpretation is related to the industrial organization of to-day.

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spun which went to market, or of what part of it, even when exchanged by the husband, was manufactured by the wife and daughters. But it is quite safe to say that spinning for the household was a universal occupation for women and that the number of those who used this, and later, weaving also, as a "gainful employment" was very large.

Every effort was made to encourage children as well as women to engage in this work. As early as 1640, a court order in Massachusetts directed an inquiry into the possibilities of manufacturing cotton cloth, "what men and woemen are skilful in the brak- ing, spinning and weaving . . . what course may be taken for teaching the boyes and girles in all towns the spinning of the yarne." A similar order in 1656 called upon every town to see that the "woemen, boyes and girles . . . spin according to their skill and ability." In the same year Hull recorded in his *Diary of Public Occurrences* that "twenty persons, or about such a number, did agree to raise a stock to procure a house and materials to improve the children and youth of the town of Boston (which want employment) in the several manufactures."

There is, in short, no lack of evidence to show that it was regarded as a public duty in the colony of Massachusetts to provide for the training of children, not only in learning, but in the words of one of the old court orders in "labor and other employments which may bee profitable to the commonwealth."

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This experiment in Boston, of which John Hull made record in 1656, was the prototype of many attempts in the following century to make children useful in developing the cloth manufacture. In 1720, the same town appointed a committee to consider the establishment of spinning schools for the instruction of the children of the town in spinning, and one of the Committee's recommendations was a suggestion that twenty spinning wheels be provided "for such children as should be sent from the alms-house"; while a generous philanthropist of the time erected at his own expense the "Spinning School House," which ten years later he bequeathed to the town "for the education of the children of the poor." There was much enthusiasm over the opening of this school, and the women of Boston, rich and poor, assembled on the Common for a public exhibition of their skill while an "immense concourse assembled to encourage them."

In the latter half of the eighteenth century, more persistent efforts were made to further the cloth-making industry, and much interest was manifested in the possibility of making children useful to this end. Two Boston newspapers announced in 1750 that it was proposed "to open several spinning schools in this Town where children may be taught *gratis*." In the following year the "Society for Encouraging Industry and Employing the Poor" was organized with the double purpose of promoting the manufacture of woolen and other cloth, and of

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employing "our own women and children who are now in a great measure idle."

The Province Laws of the session of 1753-54 provided for a tax on carriages for the support of a linen manufactory which, it was hoped, would provide employment for the poor. The preamble of the law recites that the "number of poor is greatly increased . . . and many persons, especially women, and children, are destitute of employment and in danger of becoming a public charge."

Although this scheme did not realize all the hopes of its promoters the policy was not abandoned. In 1770, Mr. William Molineux of Boston petitioned the legislature to assist him in his plan for "manufacturing the children's labour into wearing apparel" and "employing young females from eight years old and upward in earning their own support;" and the public opinion of his day commended him because, in the words of a contemporary, "The female children of this town . . . are not only useful to the community but the poorer sort are able in some measure to assist their parents in getting a livelihood."

It was claimed that, as a result of the work of the spinning schools, at least three hundred women and children had been thoroughly instructed in the art of spinning and that they had earned a large sum as wages. Domestic industries became increasingly important during this period, and children as well

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as women were employed in the various processes of manufacture carried on in the household. The report of Governor Moore of New York in 1767 to the Lords of Trade, said with regard to his province, "every home swarms with children, who are set to spin and card."

Spinning, however, for some time before this had been an employment which was fairly steady and remunerative. The "Salem Records," for example, show that in 1685, one John Wareing was loaned money "to pay spinners." In the eighteenth century, as the cloth manufacture developed, there was an increased and reasonably steady demand for yarn, so that the earnings of women spinners were by no means inconsiderable for those days. In some localities women were paid eight cents a day and their "keep" for spinning. In the Wyoming Valley, six shillings a week seems to have been the standard wage of a good spinner.

The best idea, however, of what home work in the different processes of cloth manufacture meant to the individual, can probably be gained by a study of some extracts from two old memorandum books, one belonging to the seventeenth and the other to the eighteenth century. The first of these is from an old account book of a Boston shopkeeper which has been preserved in the manuscript collections of the Boston Public Library and which records to the credit of Mrs. Mary Avery during the years 1685-89, the following items:

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	£	s.	d.
By 2 yard $\frac{1}{2}$ of buntin att.....	?	?	?
By yard $\frac{1}{2}$ of ditto att 14d.....	0	3	3
By 3 yards $\frac{1}{2}$ of half thick Kersey att 3s.3d.....	0	10	6
A coverlid.....	1	0	0
By 16 yards of druggett att — and a broom 3d....	1	17	7
By 20 yds. black searge at 4s. 6d.....	4	10	0
By 20 yds. searge at 3s. 6d.....	3	3	4
By 3 yds. of buntin at 3d.....	0	3	3
By 18 $\frac{1}{2}$ yards searge at 3/8.....	3	7	10
By a hatt 5-6.....	0	5	6
By 53 yds. of cotton and linnin at 2-9.....	7	5	9
By $\frac{1}{2}$ doz. of ? a carpett 30.....	2	14	0
By 7 hatts att 5-sd.....	1	16	9
By 4 yds. searge att ?.....	2	4	0
By 2 ditto at ?.....	1	10	0
By 4 yds. black searge.....	0	18	0
By searge.....	8	19	4 $\frac{1}{2}$
By 34 yds. searge at 3s. 6d.....	6	7	6
By 24 yards searge at ?.....	6	0	0

It should be said with regard to this account of Mrs. Avery that two or three of the entries are in her husband's name, which may mean either that they worked together or that he merely acted for her.

The illegibility of some of the entries makes it impossible to state accurately the sum total of Mrs. Avery's credit account during these years, but fifty pounds would seem to be a very safe estimate. There is, moreover, every reason to believe that this is a fairly typical account and that such work was commonly done by women throughout this period. Other account books for the same period show similar credits and the book from which Mrs. Avery's account is quoted records the names of several other women and

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the payments made to them for the same kind of work, although no record compares with hers in interest.

The eighteenth century account which is selected as of special interest, is one taken from the credit side of a merchant's book for 1781 and shows the earnings for the year of a "spinner," Theodora Orcutt, who was probably, judging from her purchases, a wife and mother.

ACCOUNT OF THEODORA ORCUTT¹

	£	s.	d.
1781.			
September (1780 ?). By spinning 11 Runs at 7/4—3 runs 7d.....	0	9	1
February 11. By spinning 4 Runs for handkerchiefs.....	0	2	4
March 2. By spinning 8 Runs linen yarn at 7d.....	0	4	8
" 6. By spinning 5 Runs tow yarn.....	0	2	8
" 13. By spinning 1 Run fine tow yarn at 7d.....	0	0	7
" 13. By spinning 2 Runs woolen yarn.....	0	1	4
April 8. By spinning 13 Runs tow yarn at 8d.....	0	6	11
" By spinning 14 Runs linen yarn.....	0	9	4
" 29. By spinning 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ Runs fine tow yarn at 8d.....	0	6	4
CARRIED FORWARD	2	3	3

¹ Temple, "History of Whately," pp. 71, 72. "A 'run' of yarn consisted of 20 knots. A 'knot' was composed of 40 threads, and a thread was 74 inches in length or once round the reel. A 'skein' of yarn consisted of 7 knots. An ordinary day's work was 4 skeins when the spinner carded her own wool; when the wool was carded by a merchant she could easily spin 6 in a day."

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ACCOUNT OF THEODORA ORCUTT—Continued.

		£	s.	d.
1781.	BROUGHT FORWARD	2	3	3
May	13. By spinning 2 Runs fine thread for stockings at 8d.....	0	1	4
"	By spinning 4 Runs tow yarn at 8d.....	0	1	4
"	By spinning 3 Runs coarse tow yarn at 4/ (O. T.).....	0	1	7
"	By spinning 3 Runs coarse linen yarn at 6d.....	0	1	6
June	19. By spinning 8 Runs fine yarn for Lawn.....	0	8	0
"	By spinning 22 Runs coarse linen yarn at 6d.....	0	11	0
"	24. By spinning 2 Runs linen yarn at 8d.....	0	1	4
July	5. By spinning 10 Runs tow yarn at 4/ (O. T.).....	0	10	4
"	9. By spinning 3½ Runs tow yarn at 4/ (O. T.).....	0	1	10
"	11. By spinning 10 Runs tow yarn at 6d. (O. T.).....	0	5	0
July	25. By spinning 3 Runs fine linen yarn at 8d.....	0	2	0
"	By spinning 2 Runs coarse linen yarn at 6d.....	0	1	0
"	By spinning 2 Runs fine tow yarn at 8d.....	0	1	4
"	31. By spinning 1 Run fine tow yarn at 8d.....	0	0	8
August	24. By spinning 19 Runs coarse linen chain.....	0	9	6
September	11. By spinning 9 Runs coarse tow yarn.....	0	1	0
	By spinning 2 Runs sent to Miss Graves.....	0	6	5
	By spinning 4 Runs tow By Do 8 Runs tow.....	0	6	5
TOTAL.....		4	8	5

This account of Theodora Orcutt is especially interesting because it shows how many different kinds of yarn had a marketable value at this time, and

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how much women must have earned by trading the product of their labor at country stores, as well as by selling it directly to the professional weavers and the small "manufactories."

Another interesting example of the way in which women exchanged the cloth which they made to purchase other articles is the list of goods which one Susannah Shepard of Wrentham tendered in part payment for a chaise. The contract and the credit were as follows:¹

"Agreed with Mrs. Susannah Shepard, of Wrentham, to make her a chaise for £55, she finding the harness, the wheels, leather for top and lining, remainder to be had in goods, at wholesale cash price, of her manufacture.

"(Signed) STEPHEN OLNEY."

PROVIDENCE, November 13, 1795.

Received of Mrs. Shepard on account of chaise.

5½ yards of thick-set at 4s. 8d.....	£1	5s.	8d.
2½ yards of velveret, at 4s. 8d.....		10s.	8d.
2¾ yards of satin bever, at 4s. 8d.....		12s.	10d.
1 yard & 2 nails of carpeting, at 3s.....		3s.	4½d.
13 yards carpeting.....	£1	18s.	7½d.
2 handkerchiefs.....		7s.	
		£4	18s. 2d.

There was, too, at this time no small amount of spinning and weaving done by women as custom

¹ See Bagnall, "Textile Industries of the United States," i, 173-174.

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work. In one New England community, near Northfield, Massachusetts, a weaver by the name of Olive Moffatt, who was a descendant of the early Scotch immigrants, was famous for such work. She was employed by most of the well-to-do families in town, and for many years her loom was considered indispensable for wedding outfits. Her linsey-woolsey cloth was considered inimitable for evenness of texture; and no one else in town could weave such patterns of linen damask. She also understood perfectly how to color fine lamb's wool yarns a beautiful shade of red with madder. The use of logwood on indigo was common enough, but a "good red" like Olive Moffatt's was difficult to obtain. Her earnings must have been very considerable for that period for she charged six pence and seven pence a skein for fine linen thread and three pence a skein or eight pence a "run" for fine woolen thread. In general the work of women spinners became more profitable after the early "manufactories" were started, but an account of these primitive establishments and of their women spinners is reserved for the succeeding chapter.

In England, weaving was a man's occupation, but "spinning and the preliminary processes of cleaning, carding and roving were conducted in the early times by the women and children."¹ In this country, although professional weavers seem to have been most frequently men, yet it is clear that weaving was not an uncommon occupation for women even in the early

¹ Chapman, "The Lancashire Cotton Industry," p. 12.

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days.¹ As the cloth manufacture developed, it became a very important one, and, as a later chapter will show, it continued to give employment to a great many women well into the nineteenth century.

It is perhaps scarcely necessary to say by way of summary, that the gainful employment of women in different processes of manufacture in their own homes,² was common enough in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In so far as the early spinners and weavers furnished their own material and disposed of their own product as custom work, they were true craftswomen, belonging to a system that has not survived to any extent in modern industry. When the product was disposed of at a country store, one of the essential elements of handicraft, "custom work," was lacking. But under whatever system they worked, these "women in industry" were an important factor in the industrial life of the period.

¹ An extract from an old account book, for example, shows a credit to "Sarah Badkuk (Babcock) for weven and coaming wistid," Weeden, i, 301; see also *ibid.*, ii, 855. Mrs. Holt's receipt for £1 5s.11d. for spinning is a relic in Bailey, "History of Andover," p. 578. In the Moravian settlement in Pennsylvania, the light weaving was entirely "woman's work" (Bagnall, i, 27), and Virginia cloth was described as "Having been made of cotton and woven with great taste by the women in the country parts." Bishop, "History of American Manufactures," i, 343.

² Two other household manufactures of which mention might be made here, are the making of lace and the manufacture of the hand cards used for combing cotton and wool; that is, the preparing the fiber for spinning. Both of these industries, however, will be referred to again in a later chapter.

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As the gainful employment of women during this period grew so largely out of their household duties, such training as they received for their work was, in a sense, part of their general education. Although girls as well as boys were apprenticed when they were very young, the girl's indenture, unlike that of the boy, failed to specify that she was to be taught a trade. Early laws provided for the binding out of the children of the poor, and in some towns where the custom of bidding off the poor prevailed, children were put to live "with some suitable person" until they were fourteen, at which age they were to be bound until they became free by law, but it was especially specified that "if boys [they be] put to some useful trade."¹ The poor law of Connecticut provided that poor children whose parents allowed them to "live idly or misspend their time in loitering" were to be bound out, a "man child until he shall come to the age of twenty-one years; and a woman child to the age of eighteen years, or time of marriage."

The girl's indenture seems to have been for the most part a mere binding out to service. She was trained doubtless to perform the domestic tasks of the housewife, and sometimes it was agreed that she was to be taught "the trade, art, or mystery of spinning woollen and linen" or knitting and sewing as well. Her indenture might require, too, that she

¹ Capen, "Historical Development of the Poor Law of Connecticut," p. 55.

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was to be "learned to read," which was again unlike that of the boy, who was also to be taught writing and occasionally even "cypering." The Province Laws of Massachusetts which provided that poor girls as well as boys were to be bound out contain the provision that "males [be taught] to read and write, females to read as they shall respectively be capable." It is of further interest with regard to the training of girls and boys that the General Court of Massachusetts desired that boys as well as girls be taught how to spin and that both girls and boys who were set to keep cattle in the various towns,¹ should "bee set to some other impliment withall, as spinning up on the rock, knitting, weveing tape."²

It seems clear, however, that although girls were called apprentices during the colonial period, this did not mean that they were consciously given any industrial training.² But it should, perhaps, be repeated that the ordinary experience of the girl in the colonial

¹ See "Massachusetts Colonial Records," i, 294; ii, 9.

² Attention may be called in passing to the fact that after two hundred and fifty years the opportunity of an apprenticed girl has increased very slightly. An industrial census to-day shows a very considerable number of girl apprentices, but the great proportion of them are in dressmaking or millinery shops where they are general service girls, learning only what will make them temporarily useful in the shop and not what is necessary to make them skilled workers in the trade. See, for example, the Bulletin "Sex and Industry," issued by the Massachusetts Bureau of Labor in 1903, which showed (p. 210) that only eighty-seven girls were serving any apprenticeship except in dressmakers' and milliners' shops. The number of apprenticed boys was 5,320.

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household tended to make her skillful in spinning and probably in weaving as well, so that she received preparation for the two most important occupations of that time without any specialized training or the serving of a formal apprenticeship.

In concluding this discussion of the employment of women during the colonial period, some reference must be made to the attitude of the public opinion of that day toward their work. The early court orders providing for the employment of women and children were not prompted solely by a desire to promote the manufacture of cloth. There was, in the spirit of them, the Puritan belief in the virtue of industry and the sin of idleness. Industry by compulsion, if not by faith, was the gospel of the seventeenth century and not only court orders but Puritan ministers warned the women of that day of the dangers of idle living.¹ Summary measures were sometimes taken to punish those who were idle. Thus the "Salem Town Records" show (December 5, 1643) "It is ordered that Margaret Page shall [be sent] to Boston Goale as a lazy, idle, loytering person where she may be sett to work for her liveinge." In 1645 and 1646 different persons were paid "for Margaret Page to keep her at worke." Among the charges against Mary Boutwell in the "Essex Records," 1640, is one "for her exorbitancy not working but liveinge idly."

¹ See Winthrop's reference to the sermon of a Boston minister in 1636 in "History of New England," i, 186.

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Perhaps the best expression of the prevailing attitude toward the employment of women at that time is to be found in one of the Province Laws of Massachusetts Bay for the session of 1692-93. The law ordered that every single person under twenty-one must live "under some orderly family government," but added the proviso that "this act shall not be construed to extend to hinder any single woman of good repute from the exercise of any lawful trade or employment for a livelihood, whereunto she shall have the allowance and approbation of the selectmen . . . any law, usage or custom to the contrary notwithstanding."

It is not, therefore, surprising to find that, in 1695, an act was passed which required single women who were self-supporting to pay a polltax as well as men.¹ That this attitude was preserved during the eighteenth century, the establishment of the spinning schools bears witness. There was, however, the further point that providing employment for poor women and children lessened the poor rates, and the first factories were welcomed because they offered a means of support to the women and children who might otherwise be "useless, if not burdensome, to society."

¹ "Province Laws," i, 213: "All single women that live at their own hand, at two shillings each, except such as through age, or extream poverty . . . are unable to contribute towards the publick charge." Men, however, of sixteen years or upwards were rated "at four shillings per poll."

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together with the new labor-saving machinery, rapidly transformed the textile industries. Great factory towns grew up in the industrial districts, and women and children went to the factories to tend the machines instead of carrying on the processes in their own homes.

Although we attempted to introduce the new machine system in this country, our progress was slow and laborious. England's ambition was to become the "workshop of the world" and her way to accomplish this seemed clear if a monopoly of these inventions could be secured. The exportation of any of the machinery used in manufacturing and the emigration of work people who had learned to operate the machines were alike prohibited. We were, therefore, cut off from profiting by the work of English inventors and we were greatly handicapped in making similar experiments for ourselves because of the lack of capital and the scarcity of skilled workmen here. After 1775, persistent attempts were made to build machines like those in use in England, but it was not until 1789, when Samuel Slater's first cotton mill was established in Rhode Island, that all of the machinery necessary for spinning was successfully installed and operated in this country.

But for nearly a quarter of a century before this mill of Slater's was established, attempts were being made to organize and extend the cloth-making industry by the old methods. Societies "for Encouraging Manufactures" were formed in Boston, New York,

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Philadelphia, and Baltimore; and so-called "manufactories" were established, which, although not very numerous, were useful in stimulating public interest in our industrial development. In them, however, neither the new machinery nor power was used and they are, on that account, to be carefully distinguished from the factories of the later period.

Most of these "manufactories" were merely rooms where several looms were gathered and where a place of business could be maintained. The spinning was done by women in their own homes, and they delivered the yarn at the establishments and were paid there for their work. Sometimes the yarn which was returned was woven in the home and the finished cloth was then returned as the yarn had been. Some establishments seem to have marketed the yarn as a finished product without having it woven and they were, therefore, merely commercial agencies.

While the great bulk of the cloth making was still carried on, as it had been, without any connection with the "manufactories," yet they must altogether have employed a considerable number of women. Thus it was said that in 1764 a Philadelphia establishment for the manufacture of linen employed more than one hundred persons in spinning and weaving, and certainly a large proportion, if not all, of the spinners were employed at home. The New York "Society for the Promotion of Arts, Agriculture and Economy" whose linen "manufactory" was commended because it had relieved "numbers of dis-

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tressed women now in the poor house," employed, in 1767-68, "above three hundred poor and necessitous persons" spinning and weaving. In Philadelphia, in 1775, the first joint stock manufacturing company was established in this country. This "United Company of Philadelphia for Promoting American Manufactures" employed some four hundred women, most of whom seem to have worked in their own homes. In an interesting advertisement¹ this company offered to "employ every good spinner that can apply, however remote from the factory, and, as many women in the country may supply themselves with the materials there and may have leisure to spin in considerable quantities, they are hereby informed that ready money will be given at the factory, up Market Street, for any parcel, either great or small, of hemp, flax, or woolen yarn. The managers return their thanks to all those industrious women who are now employed in spinning for the factory."

In 1777 a Rhode Island paper noted that "one gentleman at Barnstable has set up a woolen manufactory and receives from the spinners 500 skeins of yarn one day with another."² The cotton "manufactory" at Bethlehem, Connecticut, advertised for good linen yarn "from three to seven runs to the pound,

¹ *Pennsylvania Packet and Gazette*, quoted in Bagnall's "Textile Industries of the United States," i, 70, 71; and see pages 52, 53-54, and 63-70, 78, in regard to the other companies mentioned.

² Recopied in the *Boston Newsletter and City Record*, December 31, 1825.

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for which merchant's price will be paid from 9 pence to one shilling per run."¹

The Pennsylvania "Society for the Encouragement of Manufactures and the useful Arts" in 1787 also kept two to three hundred women at work spinning linen yarn, and the New York "Society for Encouraging American Manufactures" was employing one hundred and thirty spinners in 1789.

In some of the "manufactories" part of the women and girls worked on the premises instead of in their own homes. One of the best examples of such an establishment is the sail duck manufactory, established in Boston in 1788. In that year the *Boston Centinel* noted that the "manufactory of sail cloth and glass" would soon be completed and "give employment to a great number of persons especially females who now eat the bread of idleness." In 1789, a New York paper,² the *Gazette of the United States*, in describing the same factory, referred to the fact that "sixteen young women and as many girls under the direction of a steady matron are here employed"; and later in the year, when Washington visited the establishment, he recorded in his diary that he saw there "girls spinning with both hands" and with smaller girls to turn the wheels for them. In contrast with the arrangements of this factory, he noted on the same trip that, at Haverhill, he found a similar establishment, where "one small person" turned

¹ Bagnall, i, 197.

² *Ibid.*, 113-114.

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a wheel which employed eight spinners; "whereas at the Boston manufactory of this article each spinner" he said, "had a small girl to turn the wheel."

This Boston factory was a large and unique establishment, and it is not surprising that it attracted Washington's attention. A two-story building, one hundred and eighty feet long, had been erected on Frog Lane by the company, and it was said that in 1792 there were four hundred persons employed. Many of the spinners must have worked in their own homes, but there was an unusual feeling of solidarity among the work people wherever they were employed. Mutual aid societies were formed both among the weavers and the spinners. "The spinners admitted none into their company except by vote"; and it was said that "their measures to promote industry and self-government were very successful." President Washington at the time of his visit said of them: "They are daughters of decayed families, and are girls of character—none others are admitted."¹

Another interesting example of an early "manufactory" with a large number of employees, was an establishment also situated in Boston, which made the "cards" used for combing wool and cotton. The making of these cards had become a well-organized industry toward the close of the eighteenth century, but even after the establishment of "manufactories" the most tedious part of the work continued to be

¹ Quoted in Bishop, "History of American Manufactures," i, 419, 420.

done by women at home. New machinery had been introduced for cutting the leather and making, even cutting and bending, the wire for the teeth, which were inserted separately by hand. The materials were then distributed, and the women and children in the neighborhood worked at "setting teeth." In some places whole families were dependent on this work as their only means of support. The Boston card factory, however, was the largest one in existence and it was considered of great value to the community, because it employed "not less than twelve hundred persons, chiefly women and children."¹ When the cards were returned to the factory the women were paid at a fixed rate for every dozen they made. A few women were employed in the factory, too, examining the cards that were returned and correcting the imperfect work.

Records of careful descriptions of these early "manufactories" are extremely difficult to find, but it is evident that they were conducted according to a variety of methods. Some of them were equipped only with looms, while others carried on all of the processes of cloth making, and, in these, women seem to have been employed in various capacities. In gen-

¹ "Topographical and Historical Description of Boston," *Massachusetts Historical Society Collections*, First Series, ii, 279. Professor Levasseur in a reference to this establishment ("The American Workman," Adams's translation, p. 337) seems to magnify the importance of the industry and to assume that because these women were employed by the factory they were employed in the factory.

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eral, however, a small number of women worked on the premises of the employer and a very much larger number were employed to work in their own homes. After the introduction of the machine system and the substitution of the modern factory for the primitive manufactory, the situation was reversed. Women continued in the same occupations, but the great majority of them worked away from home. It should be noticed, however, that the factory system was introduced much more slowly into some industries than others. The application of labor-saving machinery to the manufacture of shoes, for example, was made nearly three quarters of a century after the revolution in the textile industries.

It should be noted here that throughout the nineteenth century and even at the present time, large numbers of women have continued to work very much as they did in the days of the "manufactories." The tenement workers in the so-called "sweated trades" to-day are, so far as the method of their employment is concerned, the direct descendants of the women who were employed in weaving, or in making cards for the "manufactory" of the eighteenth century. Although the women of the earlier period did their work at home, their materials were often furnished and they were employed by a manufacturer to whom they returned the product when finished and by whom they were paid for what they had done. It should be said too that while the primitive manufactories which have been described had little in common with

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the factory system of the succeeding century, yet the factory and the "manufactory" were alike dependent on women's labor.

In the earliest mills in which successful experiments were made with the new machines, women were among the operatives and the establishments were in part encouraged for this reason. In 1789, a petition in behalf of the first cotton factory of Massachusetts, that of Beverly, stated that it would "afford employment to a great number of women and children, many of whom will be otherwise useless, if not burdensome to society." In this earliest prototype of the modern cotton mill there were forty employees—both men and women. In a letter written in 1790 by one of the proprietors,¹ complaint was made that both the Worcester and the Rhode Island "undertakers" had bribed the Beverly women that had been taught to use the machines to leave at a time when they were most needed,—an interesting letter, because it indicates that Beverly was not the only place where women were employed as operatives.

It has already been pointed out that in Rhode Island, Samuel Slater, the "father of American manufactures," established the first mill in which a complete set of the new machinery was used. An interesting story is told of his method of obtaining the labor which he needed. A man by the name of Ar-

¹ "George Cabot to Benjamin Goodhue," in Rantoul, "The First Cotton Mill," *Collections of Essex Institute*, xxxiii, 37, and see also p. 40.

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nold was living with his wife and ten or twelve children, a few miles away in the woods, in a den formed by two rocks and some rough slabs of wood. When the woman was asked by Mr. Slater if she would come and work with her children in his new mill she consented upon the express condition that she should be provided with as good a house as the one in which she then lived. The first time lists for the mill, for the winter 1790-91, which have fortunately been preserved, contained the names, therefore, of Ann, Torpen, Charles, and Eunice Arnold.¹ Smith Wilkinson's account of this mill, which was published many years later, describes all of Slater's operatives as being between seven and twelve years of age. "I was then," he says, "in my tenth year and went to work for him tending the breaker."²

Another interesting factory of the period was Dickson's, at Hell Gates, near New York. When Henry Wansey, an English manufacturer, visited it in 1794, he found a good equipment in the way of machinery, and noted in his "Journal of an Excursion to the United States," "they are training up women and

¹ White, "Memoir of Samuel Slater" (1836), p. 99. In the early factory with which Moses Brown experimented before Slater's arrival, the billies and jennies were driven by men, but "cotton for this experiment was carded by hand and roped on a wooden wheel by a female." Batchelder, "Introduction and Early Progress of the Cotton Manufacture in the United States" (1863), p. 19.

² See Bagnall, "Samuel Slater and the Early Development of Manufactures," pp. 44, 45.

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children to the business, of whom I saw twenty or thirty at work." The same factory advertised in 1793 for "apprentices either boys or girls" who "will be found in everything during their apprenticeship and taught the different branches of the cotton business."

With regard to all of these early establishments, it should be clearly understood that they were only spinning mills and that their product was not cloth, but yarn. This yarn was put out in webs and woven by hand-loom weavers for the factory, or sold in country stores for purposes of household manufacture. The processes carried on in the first factories were those of carding and spinning, and the women and girls, therefore, who went into the factories to operate the new machines, were doing what had always been women's work. They had taken over no new employment, but the manner of carrying on the old had been changed.

Weaving did not become a factory occupation in this country until after 1814, when the power loom was first used here.¹ But the flying shuttle, which was used in Providence, Rhode Island, as early as 1788, and which greatly facilitated hand weaving, had come

¹ See Appleton, "The Introduction of the Power Loom and the Origin of Lowell," (1858). The power loom had been invented in 1785 by the Rev. Dr. Edmund Cartwright, but it was a long time before it was perfected and its superiority to the hand loom proved. See Taylor, "The Modern Factory System," pp. 431, 433.

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into common use long before this time.¹ The improvements in spinning which greatly increased the supply of yarn, created a new demand for weaving and as a result of the fact that this had become an occupation requiring less physical strength than formerly, women were more and more frequently employed as weavers. In 1814, the year in which the power loom was introduced, Trench Coxe, called attention to this fact in his "Digest of Manufactures." "Women," he said, "relieved in a considerable degree from their former employments as carders, spinners, and feeders by hand, occasionally turn to the occupation of the weaver with improved machinery and instruments, while the male weavers employ themselves in superintendence, instruction, superior or other operations and promote their health by occasional attentions to gardening, agriculture and the clearing and improvements of their farms."

An incident which occurred in the town of Leicester, Massachusetts, in the same year, is of interest as an illustration of the extent to which weaving was then considered "women's work." One of the early clothiers of the town enlarged his business in 1814 and began to manufacture woolen cloth. The weaving was done by men in his shop, on hand looms, but "the employment of men in what had been before regarded as within the peculiar province of females"

¹ Bishop, i, 333, 401, 410; for the use of the flying shuttle in England, see Cunningham, "History of English Industry and Commerce" (1903), ii, 502, 503.

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created an unusual degree of comment and these men weavers were said to be regarded in much the same light as were the first men milliners and dressmakers of a later day.

The history of the employment of women in the cotton mills of this country will be traced in some detail in a later chapter and a more extended account will be given of the relative numbers of men and women employed in weaving and in other departments. In conclusion, however, it should be emphasized that the earliest factories did not open any new occupations to women. So long as they were only "spinning-mills" there was merely a transferring of women's work from the home to the factory, and by the time that the establishment of the power loom had made weaving also a profitable factory operation, women had become so largely employed as weavers that they were only following this occupation, too, as it left the home. It may, in brief, be said that the result of the introduction of the factory system in the textile industries was that the work which women had been doing in the home could be done more efficiently outside of the home, but women were carrying on the same processes in the making of yarn or cloth. The place and conditions of labor had been changed, but women's work continued to be an important factor in the industry.

CHAPTER IV

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE FACTORY SYSTEM

THE relation of women and children to the early factory system can be understood only in connection with the whole labor situation as it existed at the close of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century. The labor problem of that period was fundamentally different from ours of to-day. The ease with which any man could become a freeholder and the superior chances of success in agriculture made it difficult to find men who were willing to work in manufacturing establishments and it was questionable whether sufficient labor could be found to run the new mills when they were constructed. Moreover, as a question of national economy, fear was expressed regarding the possible injury to our agricultural interests if much labor were diverted from the land. Manufactures, if they were to be established, must not, it was emphatically said, be built up at the expense of agriculture.

It has already been pointed out that, in many respects, the situation in England was quite different

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from our own. There the manufacture of cloth had become an industry of large proportions before the industrial revolution; and the establishment of the factory system created a disaffected class of unemployed workmen who were jealous of the new machinery which could be easily managed by women and children and which was taking the work away from them. In this country, however, a comparatively small number of persons were employed, and because of the absorption of our male laborers in agriculture, in so far as there was such an industry, it was for the most part in the hands of women and girls.

The establishment of the factory system, therefore, substantially meant, with us, the creation of new work, and made imperative a large increase in our wage-earning population. Moreover, this new work was identical with the work which women had long been doing in their own homes, and it was inevitable that the difficulties caused by the scarcity and high cost of male labor should be met by the employment of women. So long as land remained cheap and agriculture profitable, it was taken for granted that men could not be induced to work in the new mills and factories; and just as confidently it was expected that women could be counted on to continue, in the mills, the work they had formerly done at home.

The economic ideals of our early statesmen must also be taken into account as a factor of importance.

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Hamilton and his followers had visions of the complete development of the virgin resources of the new republic; and they hoped to formulate a policy for obtaining the maximum utility, not only from our territory, but from our population. It was logical, therefore, that Hamilton, in his famous "Report on Manufactures," should argue that one great advantage of the establishment of manufactures was "the employment of persons who would otherwise be idle. . . . In general," he said, "women and children are rendered more useful by manufacturing establishments than they otherwise would be." He also pointed out that "the husbandman himself [would experience] a new source of profit and support from the increased industry of his wife and daughters, invited and stimulated by the demands of the neighboring manufactories."

In 1794, when Trench Coxe found it necessary to reply to the argument that labor was so dear as to make it impossible for us to succeed as a manufacturing nation and that the pursuit of agriculture should occupy all our citizens, he at once called attention to the fact that the importance of women's labor must not be overlooked, since manufactures furnished the most profitable field for its employment. And in the early part of the last century, a new factory was called a "blessing to the community,"¹ among other

¹ "History of Dorchester" by a Committee of the Dorchester Antiquarian and Historical Society (1859), p. 632.

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reasons, because it would furnish employment for the women of the neighborhood. Later it was said that women were "kept out of vice simply by being employed and instead of being destitute provided with an abundance for a comfortable subsistence."

The availability of women's labor to meet the demand for hands to police the new machines was one of the arguments with which the early protectionists most frequently met their opponents. The objection that American labor was more profitably employed in agriculture than in manufactures and that to "abstract" this labor from the soil would be unwise and unprofitable, was answered by pointing to the women and children. In the pages of *Niles's Register* this is done again and again. The work of manufactures does not demand able-bodied men, it is claimed, but "is now better done by little girls from six to twelve years old." To the "Friends of Industry" as the early protectionists loved to call themselves, it was, therefore, a useful argument to be able to say that of all the employees in our manufacturing establishments not one fourth were able-bodied men fit for farming;¹ and the question was raised, Would agriculture be benefited if "on the stopping of the cot-

¹ M. Carey, "Address of the Philadelphia Society," "Essays in Political Economy," p. 69. The "Report on Protection to the Manufactures of Cotton Fabrics" said, "not one-ninth or perhaps one-tenth are able-bodied men," "American State Papers: Finance," iii, 34. See also *Niles's Register*, ix, 365.

